

## **Story of the Closure of Sanctuary Cafe**

### **June 12, 2019**

It is difficult as an employer to “set the record straight.” That’s because employers are duty bound to honor confidentiality, even when the employee has decided to speak about employment matters. It is further difficult when a hurt employee has decided to manipulate and withhold information that would provide important context. Even as we write this statement, we’ve learned that Ryan Greenlee has continued to email and text current staff asking them to “recall if they were ever harassed at Sanctuary Cafe” and that they “will not be paid (your) final check.” For our final staff that are losing their jobs and must now face the uncertainty of the job market and being forced to leave the place that they care for, this is terrifying behavior. It is for these reasons that we ask questions, investigate and ask for documentation. It is because we should not destroy the reputations and good work of the people and organizations working to make a difference. This is further complicated by a church that, while positioning itself as such, has not provided pastoral care, mediation or space for difficult conversations. It has been said that Sanctuary Cafe is a farce, and claims have been made about the ethics of business at Sanctuary Cafe as it relates to its employees. We would like to respond to these claims.

It was written in our statement on why Sanctuary Cafe is closing that Sanctuary Cafe was meant to be a space that built upon the history and public ministry of University Church. In the years prior to opening Sanctuary Cafe, our founder, Martin, worked with the leadership of University Church to re-engage the community within the building, offering the church space to community and University of Chicago groups for organizing and meeting as it historically had. Groups such as the International Socialist Organization and Organized Communities Against Deportation began meeting inside University Church during this time of re-building. The outreach to these groups was a direct result of Martin’s work.

During his time spent with congregants and the archives of University Church Martin learned of University Church opening its doors to the LGBT community in the 1960s when they were prevented from meeting on the University of Chicago campus. He learned of the story of the members to make the church available to house people at risk of deportation. In this legacy, and to fill the void left in the Church dining space by the former restaurant, Martin oversaw the exit of the former restaurant and gathered enough support from the leadership of University Church to open Sanctuary Cafe.

From its outset, Sanctuary Cafe was going to be a place that cared for people. By paying fair-wages to the staff that work for the Cafe; by operating as a scratch-kitchen where all food is made in-house with 10 ingredients or less; and through intentional vendor choices Sanctuary Cafe would care for the people in the supply chain of its production — Back Of The Yards Coffee chosen for its fair-trade, ethical and local mission; SenTeamental Moods Tea chosen not only for its quality but to support a local, black-woman owned and run business; Hyde Park Produce supplied produce for some time, and distributors like Gonnella Bakery and Natural Direct are local businesses that embraced the values of the space.

In the 30 days it took to open Sanctuary Cafe, Martin personally invested \$15,000 and hired the first Executive Chef, who then hired the first staff. In an effort toward transparency and friendship, Martin shared with the staff details about his interactions with the justice system. Martin's hope was to see Sanctuary Cafe not only as a safe space for people who had been overrun by a runaway justice system, not only for the queer community, but for people who have been marginalized by society; for people, like himself, whose stories get told for them, especially by the State. Soon after, it became clear that the Executive Chef did not understand the financial implications of certain decisions affecting the cafe and, most importantly, Martin and the Executive Chef did not share similar values and intentions for Sanctuary Cafe. The Executive Chef departed and upon leaving, delivered a letter to unknown leadership at University Church naming certain concerns around operations of the cafe. This letter has circulated to former and current leadership of the Church, but has, to date, not been presented to Martin.

The departure of the Executive Chef surprised and upset the staff of Sanctuary Cafe. Though the Executive Chef had tendered his resignation in writing, in a three hour meeting with the entire staff, it was said to Martin that he did not provide the Executive Chef due process and the working relationship at Sanctuary Cafe became a hostile between Martin and certain members of the initial staff. There were hurts felt on all sides, triggers of trauma, visceral reactions, failed attempts at reconciliatory discussions — all felt violated in the way one does when the shakey grounds of vulnerability in new relationship give way to the skepticism that society begets, and the conditioned responses instilled within us. The situation made way for a disenchanted energy among the staff and an increasingly busy Martin as he began to work in the kitchen in an effort to keep the cafe operating.

Upon opening the cafe, Martin had offered to establish an Employee Collective account. That account was funded by the generous donations of customers through the tip line at the point of sale and through cash donations. The collective generated up to \$200 per month in the first three months of operation. The purpose of the fund was to assist employees with emergencies, such as transportation and food insecurity. The fund was to be treated as a restricted fund as per policy. When one of the initial staff decided to leave the cafe, they asked that they be given 1/6 of the fund. While Martin disagreed, the remaining staff agreed and the funds were disbursed. However, because of this, Martin decided that the fund would need to be ended as the purpose of the fund had been dismissed. Each employee was given an equal amount of the funds through their payroll checks. **(See Exhibit 1)**

After a difficult first summer of 2017, with all but two of the initial staff still in place, the fall of 2017 began to see an increase in business for the cafe. Martin spoke with the employees and agreed to establish the tip line on the point of sale and through the tip jar. While no policy was established to govern the tips, Martin believed that all employees would participate in the distribution of the tips. Only after distributing the funds did Martin learn that the tips would only be given to certain staff. While Martin had no access to cash tips, any tips collected by

credit card were given to Ryan Greenlee and equally distributed to all employees due to Martin's insistence that fund be equally distributed. **(See Exhibit 2(a) and 2(b))**

We have always required our employees to notify management in writing if there were time clock errors. This is also true if management needed to modify time. Our policy on sick leave was created after Greenlee learned that we were required by Chicago Ordinance to have a written and displayed Sick Leave Policy. Unfortunately, Greenlee's notification of the need for a policy was selfish and damaging. Greenlee also was attempting to use sick time to be paid for his final three days of work, after his resignation. This is disallowed at all companies in order to prevent the type of abuse Greenlee was attempting. **(See Exhibit 3(a), 3(b), 3(c) and 3(d))**

In February 2018 Martin informed the staff that, despite his assumption, the payroll processing done by Intuit did not include depositing and filing taxes on behalf of the organization. All funds collected from employees for taxes in 2017 were returned to employees in February 2018 with 1099 forms and the organization switched to ADP for employee payroll processing and thereafter employees were classified as employees. People who work at Sanctuary Cafe are able to opt to be classified as 1099 employees and in this case, employees offer their availability. Half of all employees in the cafe select this option for reasons they are not required to explain.

In March 2018, Ellen Lose, a congregant of University Church, came to work at Sanctuary Cafe as a Barista. Ellen named in her interview that she understood that her identity as a white, middle class, seemingly straight woman was an identity contrary to the employee Sanctuary Cafe wished to create space for, but she was accepted by the staff in that awareness of Self. Soon, the differences instilled within the staff and engrained within traumas showed themselves and, as Ellen became increasingly managerial — spending off-the-clock time to reorganize the space for efficiency, performing deep cleaning and taking interest in administrative operations — the initial staff became increasingly hostile.

In June 2018, Ellen was named as the Director of Partnerships and Events of Stories Connect, and she proposed to Martin a 3-person management structure which would include the then Front of House Manager Ryan Greenlee, Executive Chef Warniece Malone, and herself, while allowing Martin to focus less on Cafe operations and more on the creative work and the administrative and structural needs of Stories Connect. Martin accepted this proposed structure, and offered the appointments to Greenlee and Malone. Weekly management meetings between Martin, Ellen, Ryan and Warniece began in June 2018.

There were many accomplishments during this time, and many missed opportunities. The Cafe grew exponentially and everyone involved had difficulty keeping up — the kitchen staff was working tremendous amounts of overtime; the Cafe staff worked long hours doing dishes as we could not afford to hire for their requested dishwashing support; the finances of the Cafe could not support the commitment to fair-wages for what grew from a 6-person to a 12-person staff. Martin continued to lend personal funds to the business to ensure that people were paid. On several occasions, staff were asked to delay pay for up to 7 days so that all employees could be

paid at the same time, and on several more occasions, managers opted to delay pay in order for other employees to be paid on schedule. Despite these challenges, Sanctuary Cafe has never missed a payroll and employees have never been asked to forgive payments due. Martin has never taken a regular salary, despite consistently working in excess of 70 hours per week, has not processed reimbursements due to him for materials purchased and has not had his loans repaid. Incidentally, the highest paid employee in 2018 was Greenlee, followed by Malone.

Unrest among some of the staff continued and much of this was due to cultural conflict among staff. This included anti-LGBTQIA statements, immigration misunderstanding, cultural assumption and art of a sexual nature residing inside the cafe, which was still used by the church on Sundays. While many issues were brought forward, and discussions were had, Martin was never made aware of issues that could not be discussed among staff. Martin did field issues of misconduct leveled by parents, cafe staff and visitors expressing issues around the behavior of church staff and issues of drug use by staff while on duty. Recognizing the unrest within the staff of the cafe (**See Exhibit 4**), Martin engaged the Restorative Justice organization Nehemiah Trinity Rising (NTR) to lead the staff in establishing safe space agreements, values and guidelines that would govern the space. The staff met for a 3-day workshop in June 2018 (with option to clock-in, which most, but not all, did) that ended early due to lack of participation. In light of this, Managers Greenlee and Malone then accepted Martin's offer to attend the 4-day Restorative Justice skills-transfer offered by Nehemiah Trinity Rising, in an effort to better equip the management to support the staff in learning the practices of restorative justice. Malone and Greenlee completed the skills-transfer (as did Martin) and, in July, the staff completed the process in establishing collective safe space agreements, values and guidelines which were later incorporated to the Employee Handbook that Ellen Lose and a contracted employee created. (**See Exhibit 5**)

During the time of Greenlee's management, the claims that have now been made publicly about Martin's alleged mismanagement and harassment were never presented to Martin personally. Conversation about these claims was not and still would not be rejected by Martin. Some of the conversation that Greenlee presented during their time in management included: a request for more-timely notice before pay delays; discussion about the unsettled history of tips at the Cafe, which alluded to Martin's allowance for and then elimination of the tip line — per the staff's request and disappointment, respectively — as Martin wrestled with what it meant to pay fair-wages and reached his limit in personal investment; programming discussions that touched on the sex-positivity we wished to take hold in society, as is relevant for many organizations that seek to provide safe space for, specifically, queer and marginalized communities. Greenlee had ample time and opportunity to discuss with Martin personally, and access to the restorative justice practitioners of Nehemiah Trinity Rising, and other managers, to seek resolve toward any concern.

During this time, and without the awareness that Greenlee had sought out the Church leadership to carry forward the effort made during the Executive Chef's departure, Stories Connect was actively seeking engagement with the leadership of the Church.

Vince Cole, University Church Minister of Housing, was delegated by the University Church Board to coordinate with Stories Connect. Stories Connect was invited by Cole to present to the University Church Board on January 10, 2019, but was then disallowed from presenting at the meeting and was not asked to return — an opportunity allowed to other “mission partners” of University Church in the following months.

On November 28, 2018, Martin met with the-then moderator, Stephanie Weaver ‘about Stories Connect in the building in anticipation of the next board meeting.’ That meeting adjourned with the understanding that Stories Connect would present concerns to the University Church board about concerns around finances and that Weaver would work with the incoming moderator to schedule that first in the new year. This did not occur. **(See Exhibit 6)**

On January 13, 2019, Martin emailed Board Moderator Sarah Jones requesting that Stories Connect be allowed to present to the University Church Board in February. See attached email thread as **Exhibit 7**

On February 13, 2019 Martin met with the Finance Committee chair to discuss financial issues that needed to be discussed, including rent and other-unreimbursed costs. **(See Exhibit 9)**

On February 14, 2019, Stories Connect management was asked to sit with select Board members and Staff from University Church for an executive session during which they represented vague and non-specific claims now made by Greenlee, and asked Martin to respond. Martin’s request for details or documentation of the wide variety of the allegations were denied. Martin was clear that he requested these things because of his personal disagreement with accusation in anonymity, and in critique of the justice system that seeks easy solutions over fact-finding investigation, but was open to receiving any claim and would be appreciative for an opportunity to apologize if something he said or did caused someone discomfort. Martin requested the Church mediate discussion between the person(s) making the claims and himself, but no effort was made. **(See Exhibit 10)**

The executive session on February 14 lasted no longer than 2 hours. In the end, Pastor Julian DeShazier was to send an email to the participants summarizing the meeting and listing next steps, but this email was never sent. Some of the items to be resolved were: Stories Connect to properly install its Board; Sanctuary Cafe to reaffirm its practices around time-clock verification; an adoption of policies required by the state, namely a sexual harassment policy. Stories Connect was not disagreeable to conversing about and adopting any necessary structural solutions. Stories Connect made clear that, while willing to comply, it feels strongly that policies are created to penalize, and that we stand for and with the penalized, not the policy. Martin was clear that our policies would need to be supportive of the Restorative Justice practices the staff established, which does not use policy to penalize, investigates concerns and asks people to speak directly with the persons they feel hurt by. It was left unclear as to whom Stories

Connect was accountable for these solutions; no timeline was established; and it was not made known that Sanctuary Cafe was in jeopardy of closing.

On March 10, 2019 Martin met with the Finance Committee of University Church and raised issues around the establishment of rent amounts for the cafe without speaking with cafe staff. He also raised other important cost recovery issues. issues **(see Exhibit 10)**

In the week following this meeting, Sanctuary Cafe received the first visit from the Department of Business Affairs who cited Sanctuary Cafe for operating without a business license. There was an issuance of a 30 day temporary business license and an administrative court summons issued. Stories Connect was offered counsel from an attorney, who was a new member congregant of University Church, who advised that a variance to the zoning which prevented Sanctuary Cafe from attaining a business license was a probable solution. The course of action was to seek letters of support from the community, including from the neighboring residences. Further, the attorney would represent Stories Connect in court and request a delay, as we were working to fix this issue. This information was reported to Vince Cole, and later sent in email **(See Exhibit 11)** by Martin. It is notable that the previous restaurant operating inside University Church reports that they made the church aware of the issues around the business license and, apparently, the letter sent by the former Executive Chef is reported to reference an issue with the business license, which would mean that the church had several opportunities to work to resolve this issue along with its tenants, including non-restaurant tenants required to obtain a business license to operate within the building.

On March 20, 2019 the next meeting was set to occur on March 22, 2019 with Michelle Day of Nehemiah Trinity Rising to discuss Restorative Justice practices, what they could and could not do and what we could do to begin a better relational process between the church and cafe. The Restorative Justice learning session came to a close, the Nehemiah Trinity Rising practitioner and circle keeper offered their services free of charge to do a restorative justice investigation of the issues being named. Stories Connect gladly accepted the offer. Participants at this meeting were asked to name the things they needed in order to operate in peace together through this difficult time. The participating leadership of the Church asked that they not be addressed personally, and that the dealings between the Church and the Cafe not be brought up on Sundays. Stories Connect agreed. Stories Connect named, in response, a request to open discussion about, or to table any action on, the upcoming transition from Lease to Space Use Agreement. The request was denied by the restorative justice practitioner leading the gathering as they understood it to be a legal matter. It was expressed by Stories Connect that a relational conversation was being requested, but the group was reminded that this meeting was not to discuss the issues, but to jointly learn what restorative justice can do and cannot do. **(See Exhibit 12)**

Following this meeting, the restorative justice investigation by Nehemiah Trinity Rising began. Lose was interviewed on April 4, 2019, and some or all participating members in the executive session from the Church were interviewed. Before Martin was interviewed he received notice

by the investigator that the process was ended. No reason was given. No communication from the Church was made to Stories Connect about the outcome of the investigation or next steps.

What is observable is that the Church was given information about the operations of Sanctuary Cafe in the letter left by the Executive Chef in 2017, and in continued communications with Greenlee thereafter.

On March 31, 2019 the Lease ended. In an email on April 2, 2019 from Martin he again explained that Stories Connect was working to solve the business licensure issue with the help of an attorney.

It is notable that the church made significant concessions in rent to allow the cafe to meet its personnel and inventory obligations. Rent was forgiven in 2017 and rent was reduced in 2018. In 2019, we were being asked to pay a much higher assessment that seemed to be a claw back of those concessions. We actively asked that this new rent proposal be reconsidered.

On April 5, 2019 Stories Connect received the notification of Non-Renewal of Lease (**See Exhibit 13**). This was responded to by Martin on April 9, 2019 (See Exhibit 14). The subsequent lawsuit (**See Exhibit 14**) filed named Martin as a Defendant, even though he had not personally guaranteed the lease arrangement with the church. This means that with an eviction process, the church allowed an eviction to be placed against him personally, which has an effect on his ability to obtain credit.

Verbal communications continued between Stories Connect management and Vince Cole. During this time, Lose proposed to Martin an idea to transition Sanctuary Cafe to a donations-only model (more commonly known as a Pay-What-You-Want or “PWYW” restaurant) which would mitigate the need for a business license and the potential risk of University Church’s tax exempt status due to business operation within the building. Martin and the rest of Stories Connect Management did not feel this would be a successful model, but approved Lose to research further. Regardless, Stories Connect became resigned to closing Sanctuary Cafe, and expressed to Vince Cole that we wished to have until the end of the University of Chicago quarter, June 14th, to close operations. Cole assured the group that he could have this done, a claim he later denied having made, and expressed that if there were any other option, he would seek it out. It was at this time that Lose first presented to Cole, in the presence of Stories Connect management, the idea of transitioning Sanctuary Cafe from a point-of-sale to a PWYW model. Cole gave the group every reason to believe that this would be a viable option. In the days following, Cole and Lose called the City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs together and confirmed that, even if suggested pricing is named, the lack of required purchase mitigates the need for a business license. After these verbal confirmations, the email thread (link) began. It was in this email thread that the financial concerns of an outstanding repayment from joint fundraiser and coverage of start-up costs incurred to the Church were added to list of problems to be solved. At this time the Sanctuary Cafe staff was being provided updates (link).

Out of these conversations the next offering made to Stories Connect was to meet with the University Church treasurer, proposed meeting dates of May 8 or 10, 2019. This meeting did not occur. (Link)

It was made known by Lose to Cole that Stories Connect wished to represent itself at the University Church Board meeting on May 12, 2019. This was disallowed.

Lose went to the Board on May 12 and asked for conversation about the decision to close Sanctuary Cafe to be re-opened. Lose was reminded by Board Moderator Sarah Jones that they took great lengths to make this a business decision, not a personal one, and that the decision had been delegated to the University Church Finance Committee and Vince Cole.

Following the meeting, Lose appealed to Finance Committee Chair to be placed in the Agenda for their June 2 meeting. At this time it was made known that an oversight in accounting was found by Stories Connect as Martin reconciled its finances, which reflected a \$3,800 (April 2017) and \$200 (November 2018) payment made by Stories Connect to University Church toward initial start-up costs that was not reflected on the ledger. It was also made known that Stories Connect intended to reconcile the remaining amount of transfers to University Church for start-up costs and for the October 2018 Margarito's Forest fundraiser. These reconciliations were completed in May 2019. It was also communicated that Stories Connect has verified with Vince Cole and the City of Chicago of a viable proposal to transition Sanctuary Cafe to a PWYW Community Cafe, which would mitigate the risk imposed to the Church by the current structure. The Chair would not overrule the decision already made by the committee to put Stories Connect on the Agenda, but would offer Lose's wishes to the Committee. It was also suggested that any information can be sent to the Committee, but that this does not guarantee an addition to the agenda.

On May 19, 2019 Lose made a Prayer Request to the congregation of University Church regarding the upcoming eviction notice that Cole had warned Stories Connect we would receive in the following week.

On May 24, 2019 Stories Connect was invited to be on the Agenda of the June 2 Finance Committee Meeting for 20 minutes.

At the June 2, 2019 meeting Stories Connect presented their 2017, 2018 and 2019 financial reports and updated the Finance Committee that the financial reconciliations to the church had been made, and sought approval for to transition Sanctuary Cafe to a PWYW model. The Committee reflected that based on a long list of problems presented about Stories Connect to the Church, there was no way forward together and, again, this was a business decision, not personal.

On June 3, 2019, University Church sent out its statement (link), to which Stories Connect responded to on June 5, 2019.



On June 9, 2019, Pastor Julian DeShazier announced to the University Church that the Sunday worship service was not a time to win people over for our cause as it relates to the situation with Sanctuary Cafe.

It is the observation of Stories Connect that, after the concerns shared with the Church by what was a hostile staff, the Church found a way to, as they have stated, make the decision to close Sanctuary Cafe one of business, not personal.

Stories Connect does not discredit University Church for feeling the need to protect itself as a legacy institution, or that it made decisions with the information that it was given.

Stories Connect does wish to call attention to the opportunities missed for an alternative ending and a potential new beginning for Sanctuary Cafe, recognizing that, for what has been named wrong, much has been made right by the management of Stories Connect; that good intent and a willingness to be brought to accountability on issues overlooked or alleged should be viewed as workable; that, if nothing else, Sanctuary Cafe was of enough benefit to the community to be worth saving.

Stories Connect does not reject conversation from folks who seek to ask questions and can healthily manage the fear that accusation imposes, for all parties affected. Within our management and staff we have employed people on both sides of that line, and we are, in the current state, a healthy staff.

Stories Connect is hopeful that this timeline makes known that it actively sought to communicate and solve each issue named by the church with the hope of keeping Sanctuary Cafe open to the community.

Stories Connect was hopeful that the church would engage in theological, social and systemic reflection about the organic opportunity that was created within Sanctuary Cafe for ministry and justice work.

Stories Connect feels personally hurt by the statement issued by University Church leadership and called attention to its closing: “it is important you know about this ongoing situation and continue to trust that your church leadership values transparency, care, and our wise legal advice”. Stories Connect maintains that transparency was not had, care was not given, and that wise legal advice often asks us to operate outside of good faith, or without seeking truth; that a Church which critiques the justice system should reflect on its position when it finds itself using that same system to its benefit at the cost of community, and human spirit; that personal communications could have been engaged at any time to resolve business concerns amongst congregants; that there is always an opportunity and responsibility for mercy and fellowship within beloved community; and that no legitimate concern remains for the reason for the closure of Sanctuary Cafe except for the Church’s desire to separate itself from Stories Connect as an organization led by Martin — that this was personal, cloaked in the language of business. We’ve had Sanctuary Cafe and visitors level complaints, including, shaming using social media,

theft and sexual harassment, against current and former church staff. Our request for information, i.e., text messages and emails, was typically met with non-response. In several cases, because of our desire to find healing, we have been able to resolve these issues with care. Unfortunately, we have not been given details about any allegation, let alone documentation about alleged misbehavior inside the cafe.

Stories Connect does not wish to do business with people or organizations that cannot recognize that business is personal. When University Church's bank accounts were frozen because of unresolved tax issues, or when the trustees of the church failed to certify that the users of the building were in compliance with the law in regard to property tax exemptions, or when the church was dissolved as a legal entity for five years, the church community set aside the business issues and rallied to fix the issues and the relationships. Stories Connect accepts its forced exit from the building of University Church and will close Sanctuary Cafe on June 15, as proposed.

It is with deep pain and strength - both, and that the management of Stories Connect and the current staff of Sanctuary Cafe have endured the prolonged effort to close Sanctuary Cafe. It has been in consideration of the countless customers that we know by name that we continued this far through what has felt like maximum adversity. We mourn the opportunity to continue growing in relationship with the people that we have served at Sanctuary Cafe.

We have no aim but to tell our story, which was the impetus behind Stories Connect as Martin began the writers-collective in 2015. We believe that we are redeemed when we tell our stories in our own voice, and we know that this story is to be continued. We, Martin and Ellen, the remaining management of Stories Connect, are utterly exhausted, but willingly defeated — we tried our best to do a good thing, even as the deeply broken individuals that we are. We have always put the people in the Sanctuary Cafe above the business. Said differently, it is to put Truth of the Gospel before the Peace of the Church. For us, this is success.

For inquiries:

Ellen Lose

[ellen@storiesconnect.org](mailto:ellen@storiesconnect.org)

(630) 267-5608